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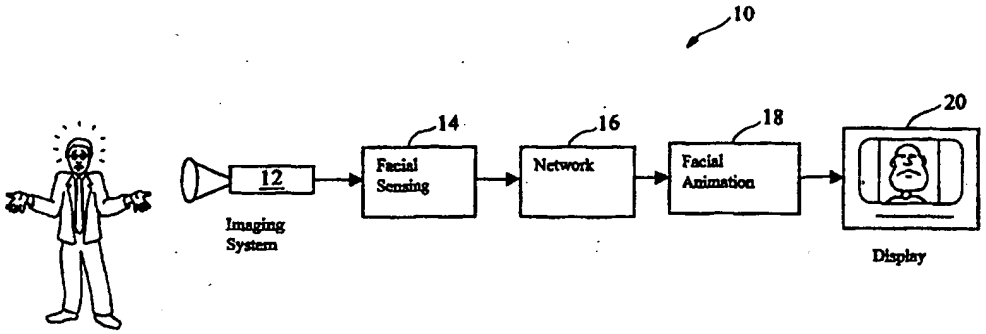

(57) Abstract

The present invention is embodied in an apparatus, and related method, for sensing a person's facial movements, features and characteristics and the like to generate and animate an avatar image based on facial sensing. The avatar apparatus uses an image processing technique based on model graphs and bunch graphs that efficiently represent image features as jets. The jets are composed of wavelet transforms processed at node or landmark locations on an image corresponding to readily identifiable features. The nodes are acquired and tracked to animate an avatar image in accordance with the person's facial movements. Also, the facial sensing may use jet similarity to determine the person's facial features and characteristic thus allows tracking of a person's natural characteristics without any unatural elements that may interfere or inhibit the person's natural characteristics.

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WAVELET-BASED FACIAL MOTION CAPTURE FOR AVATAR ANIMATION

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to dynamic facial feature sensing, and more particularly, to a vision-based motion capture system that allows real-time finding, tracking and classification of facial features for input into a graphics engine that animates an avatar.

Background of the Invention

Virtual spaces filled with avatars are an attractive way to allow for the experience of a shared environment. However, existing shared environments generally lack facial feature sensing of sufficient quality to allow for the incarnation of a user, i.e., the endowment of an avatar with the likeness, expressions or gestures of the user. Quality facial feature sensing is a significant advantage because facial gestures are a primordial means of communications. Thus, the incarnation of a user augments the attractiveness of virtual spaces.

Existing methods of facial feature sensing typically use markers that are glued to a person's face. The use of markers for facial motion capture is cumbersome and has generally restricted the use of facial motion capture to high-cost applications such as movie production.

Accordingly, there exists a significant need for a vision based motion capture systems that implements convenient and efficient facial feature sensing. The present invention satisfies this need.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention is embodied in an apparatus, and related method, for sensing a person's facial movements, features or characteristic. The results of the facial sensing may be used to animate an avatar image. The avatar apparatus uses an image processing technique based on model graphs and bunch graphs that efficiently represent image features as jets composed of wavelet transforms at landmarks on a facial image corresponding to readily identifiable features. The sensing system allows tracking of a person's natural

characteristics without any unnatural elements to interfere with the person's natural characteristics.

The feature sensing process operates on a sequence of image frames transforming each image frame using a wavelet transformation to generate a transformed image frame. Node locations associated with wavelets jets of a model graph to the transformed image frame are initialized by moving the model graph across the transformed image frame and placing the model graph at a location in the transformed image frame of maximum jet similarity between the wavelet jets at the node locations and the transformed image frame. The location of one or more node locations of the model graph is tracked between image frames. A tracked node is reinitialized if the node's position deviates beyond a predetermined position constraint between image frames.

In one embodiment of the invention, the facial feature finding may be based on elastic bunch graph matching for individualizing a head model. Also, the model graph for facial image analysis may include a

plurality of location nodes (e.g., 18) associated with distinguishing features on a human face.

Other features and advantages of the present invention should be apparent from the following description of the preferred embodiments, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, which illustrate, by way of example, the principles of the invention.

Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an avatar animation system and process, according to the invention.

FIG. 2 is block diagram of a facial feature sensing apparatus and process, according to the invention, for the avatar animation system and process of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram of a video image processor for implementing the facial feature sensing apparatus of FIG. 2.

FIG. 4 is a flow diagram, with accompanying photographs, for illustrating a landmark finding

technique of the facial feature sensing apparatus and system of FIG. 2.

FIG. 5 is a series of images showing processing of a facial image using Gabor wavelets, according to the invention.

FIG. 6 is a series of graphs showing the construction of a jet, image graph, and bunch graph using the wavelet processing technique of FIG. 5, according to the invention.

FIG. 7 is a diagram of a model graph, according to the invention, for processing facial images.

FIG. 8 includes two diagrams showing the use of wavelet processing to locate facial feature.

FIG. 9 is a flow diagram showing a tracking technique for tracking landmarks found by the landmark finding technique of FIG. 4.

FIG. 10 is a diagram of a Gaussian image pyramid technique for illustrating landmark tracking in one dimension.

FIG. 11 is a series of two facial images, with accompanying graphs of pose angle versus frame number,

showing tracking of facial features over a sequence of 50 image frames.

FIG. 12 is a flow diagram, with accompanying photographs, for illustrating a pose estimation technique of the facial feature sensing apparatus and system of FIG. 2.

FIG. 13 is a schematic diagram of a face with extracted eye and mouth regions, for illustrating a course-to-fine landmark finding technique.

FIG. 14 are photographs showing the extraction of profile and facial features using the elastic bunch graph technique of FIG. 6.

FIG. 15 is a flow diagram showing the generation of a tagged personalized bunch graph along with a corresponding gallery of image patches that encompasses a variety of a person's expressions for avatar animation, according with the invention.

FIG. 16 is a flow diagram showing a technique for animating an avatar using image patches that are transmitted to a remote site, and that are selected at the remote site based on transmitted tags based on

facial sensing associated with a person's current facial expressions.

FIG. 17 is a flow diagram showing rendering of a three-dimensional head image generated, based on facial feature positions and tags, using volume morphing integrated with dynamic texture generation.

FIG. 18 is a block diagram of an avatar animation system, according to the invention, that includes audio analysis for animating an avatar.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

The present invention is embodied in an apparatus, and related method, for sensing a person's facial movements, features and characteristics and the like to generate and animate an avatar image based on the facial sensing. The avatar apparatus uses an image processing technique based on model graphs and bunch graphs that efficiently represent image features as jets. The jets are composed of wavelet transforms are processed at node or landmark locations on an image corresponding to readily identifiable features. The nodes are acquired and tracked to animate an avatar

image in accordance with the person's facial movements. Also, the facial sensing may use jet similarity to determine the person's facial features and characteristics thus allowing tracking of a person's natural characteristics without any unnatural elements that may interfere with the person's natural characteristics.

As shown in FIG. 1, the avatar animation system 10 of the invention includes an imaging system 12, a facial sensing process 14, a data communication network 16, a facial animation process 18, and an avatar display 20. The imaging system acquires and digitizes a live video image signal of a person thus generating a stream of digitized video data organized into image frames. The digitized video image data is provided to the facial sensing process which locates the person's face and corresponding facial features in each frame. The facial sensing process also tracks the positions and characteristics of the facial features from frame-to-frame. The tracking information may be transmitted via the network to one or more remote sites which receives the information and generates, using a

graphics engine, an animated facial image on the avatar display. The animated facial image may be based on a photorealistic model of the person, a cartoon character or a face completely unrelated to the user.

The imaging system 12 and the facial sensing process 14 are shown in more detail in FIGS. 2 and 3. The imaging system captures the person's image using a digital video camera 22 which generates a stream of video image frames. The video image frames are transferred into a video random-access memory (VRAM) 24 for processing. A satisfactory imaging system is the Matrox Meteor II available from Matrox™ which generates digitizing images produced by a conventional CCD camera and transfers the images in real-time into the memory at a frame rate of 30Hz. The image frame is processed by an image processor 26 having a central processing unit (CPU) 28 coupled to the VRAM and random-access memory RAM 30. The RAM stores program code and data for implementing the facial sensing and avatar animation processes.

The facial feature process operates on the digitized images to find the person's facial feature

(block 32), track the features (block 34), and reinitializes feature tracking as needed. The facial features also may be classified (block 36). The facial feature process generates data associated with the position and classification of the facial features with is provided to an interface with the facial animation process (block 38)

The facial feature may be located using an elastic graph matching shown in FIG. 4. In the elastic graph matching technique, a captured image (block 40) is transformed into Gabor space using a wavelet transformation (block 42)which is described below in more detail with respect to FIG. 5. The transformed image (block 44) is represented by 40 complex values, representing wavelet components, per each pixel of the original image. Next, a rigid copy of a model graph, which is described in more detail below with respect to FIG. 7, is positioned over the transformed image at varying model node positions to locate a position of optimum similarity (block 46). The search for the optimum similarity may be performed by positioning the model graph in the upper left hand corner of the image,

extracting the jets at the nodes, and determining the similarity between the image graph and the model graph. The search continues by sliding the model graph left to right starting from the upper-left corner of the image (block 48). When a rough position of the face is found (block 50), the nodes are individually allowed to move, introducing elastic graph distortions (block 52). A phase-insensitive similarity function is used in order to locate a good match (block 54). A phase-sensitive similarity function is then used to locate a jet with accuracy because the phase is very sensitive to small jet displacements. The phase-insensitive and the phase-sensitive similarity functions are described below with respect to FIGS. 5-8. Note that although the graphs are shown in FIG. 4 with respect to the original image, the model graph movements and matching are actually performed on the transformed image.

The wavelet transform is described with reference to FIG. 5. An original image is processed using a Gabor wavelet to generate a convolution result. The Gabor-based wavelet consists of a two-dimensional complex wave field modulated by a Gaussian envelope.

$$\psi_{\vec{k}}(x) = \frac{k^2}{\sigma^2} e^{-x^2 \frac{k^2}{2\sigma^2}} \{ e^{i\vec{k}\vec{x}} - e^{\frac{-\sigma^2}{2}} \} \quad (1)$$

The wavelet is a plane wave with wave vector $\vec{k}$, restricted by a Gaussian window, the size of which relative to the wavelength is parameterized by σ. The term in the brace removes the DC component. The amplitude of the wavevector k may be chosen as follows where ν is related to the desired spacial resolutions.

$$k_\nu = 2^{-\frac{\nu+2}{2}} \pi, \nu = 1,2,... \quad (2)$$

A wavelet, centered at image position $\vec{x}$ is used to extract the wavelet component $J_{\vec{k}}$ from the image with gray level distribution $I(\vec{x})$,

$$J_{\vec{k}}(\vec{x}) = \int d\vec{x}' I(\vec{x}') \psi_{\vec{k}}(\vec{x} - \vec{x}') \quad (3)$$

The space of wave vectors $\vec{k}$ is typically sampled in a discrete hierarchy of 5 resolution levels (differing by half-octaves) and 8 orientations at each resolution level (see, e.g., FIG. 8), thus generating 40 complex values for each sampled image point (the real and imaginary components referring to the cosine and sine phases of the plane wave). The samples in k-

space are designated by the index j = 1,..,40 and all wavelet components centered in a single image point are considered as a vector which is called a jet 60, shown in FIG. 6. Each jet describes the local features of the area surrounding $\vec{x}$. If sampled with sufficient density, the image may be reconstructed from jets within the bandpass covered by the sampled frequencies. Thus, each component of a jet is the filter response of a Gabor wavelet extracted at a point (x, y) of the image.

A labeled image graph 62, as shown in FIG. 6, is used to describe the aspect of an object (in this context, a face). The nodes 64 of the labeled graph refer to points on the object and are labeled by jets 60. Edges 66 of the graph are labeled with distance vectors between the nodes. Nodes and edges define the graph topology. Graphs with equal topology can be compared. The normalized dot product of the absolute components of two jets defines the jet similarity. This value is independent of contrast changes. To compute the similarity between two graphs, the sum is taken

over similarities of corresponding jets between the graphs.

A model graph 68 that is particularly designed for finding a human face in an image is shown in FIG. 7. The numbered nodes of the graph have the following locations:

0 right eye pupil
1 left eye pupil
2 top of the nose
3 right corner of the right eyebrow
4 left corner of the right eyebrow
5 right corner of the left eyebrow
6 left corner of the left eyebrow
7 right nostril
8 tip of the nose
9 left nostril
10 right corner of the mouth
11 center of the upper lip
12 left corner of the mouth
13 center of the lower lip
14 bottom of the right ear
15 top of the right ear
16 top of the left ear
17 bottom of the left ear

To represent a face, a data structure called bunch graph 70 (FIG. 6) is used. It is similar to the graph described above, but instead of attaching only a single jet to each node, a whole bunch of jets 72 (a bunch jet) are attached to each node. Each jet is derived from a different facial image. To form a bunch graph,

a collection of facial images (the bunch graph gallery) is marked with node locations at defined positions of the head. These defined positions are called landmarks. When matching a bunch graph to an image, the jet extracted from the image is compared to all jets in the corresponding bunch attached to the bunch graph and the best-matching one is selected. This matching process is called elastic bunch graph matching. When constructed using a judiciously selected gallery, a bunch graph covers a great variety of faces that may have significantly different local properties e.g. samples of male and female faces, and of persons of different ages or races.

Again in order to find a face in an image frame, the graph is moved and scaled and distorted until a place is located at which the graph matches best (the best fitting jets within the bunch jets are most similar to jets extracted from the image at the current positions of the nodes). Since face features differ from face to face, the graph is made more general for the task, e.g. each node is assigned with jets of the

corresponding landmark taken from 10 to 100 individual faces.

Two different jet similarity functions for two different, or even complementary, tasks are employed. If the components of a jet $\vec{J}$ are written in the form with amplitude and phase φ_j one form for the similarity of two jets $\vec{J}$ and $\vec{J}'$ is the normalized scalar product of the amplitude vector

$$S(\vec{J},\vec{J}') = \frac{\sum a_j a'_j}{\sqrt{\sum a_j^2 \sum a_j'^2}} \qquad (4)$$

The other similarity function has the form

$$S(\vec{J},\vec{J}') = \frac{\sum a_j a'_j \cos(\phi_j - \phi'_j - \vec{d}\vec{k}_j)}{\sqrt{\sum a_j^2 \sum a_j'^2}} \qquad (5)$$

This function includes a relative displacement vector between the image points to which the two jets refer. When comparing two jets during graph matching, the similarity between them is maximized with respect to d, leading to an accurate determination of jet position. Both similarity functions are used, with preference often given to the phase-insensitive version (which varies smoothly with relative position) when first

matching a graph, and to the phase-sensitive version when accurately positioning the jet.

After the facial features are located, the facial features may be tracked over consecutive frames as illustrated in FIG. 9. The tracking technique of the invention achieves robust tracking over long frame sequences by using a tracking correction scheme that detects whether tracking of a feature or node has been lost and reinitializes the tracking process for that node.

The position X_n of a single node in an image I_n of an image sequence is known either by landmark finding on image I_n using the landmark finding method (block 80) described above, or by tracking the node from image I_(n-1) to I_n using the tracking process. The node is then tracked (block 82) to a corresponding position X_(n+1) in the image I_(n+1) by one of several techniques. The tracking methods described below advantageously accommodate fast motion.

A first tracking technique involves linear motion prediction. The search for the corresponding node position X_(n+1) in the new image I_(n+1) is started at

a position generated by a motion estimator. A disparity vector (X_n - X_(n-1)) is calculated that represents the displacement, assuming constant velocity, of the node between the preceding two frames. The disparity or displacement vector D_n may be added to the position X_n to predict the node position X_(n+1). This linear motion model is particularly advantageous for accommodating constant velocity motion. The linear motion model also provides good tracking if the frame rate is high compared to the acceleration of the objects being tracked. However, the linear motion model performs poorly if the frame rate is too low compared to the acceleration of the objects in the image sequence. Because it is difficult for any motion model to track objects under such conditions, use of a camera having a higher frame rate is recommended.

The linear motion model may generate too large of an estimated motion vector D_n which could lead to an accumulation of the error in the motion estimation. Accordingly, the linear prediction may be damped using a damping factor f_D. The resulting estimated motion

vector is D_n = f_D * (X_n - X_(n-1)). A suitable damping factor is 0.9. If no previous frame I_(n-1) exist, e.g., for a frame immediately after landmark finding, the estimated motion vector is set equal to zero (D_n = 0).

A tracking technique based on a Gaussian image pyramid, applied to one dimension, is illustrated in FIG. 10. Instead of using the original image resolution, the image is down sampled 2-4 times to create a Gaussian pyramid of the image. An image pyramid of 4 levels results in a distance of 24 pixels on the finest, original resolution level being represented as only 3 pixels on the coarsest level. Jets may be computed and compared at any level of the pyramid.

Tracking of a node on the Gaussian image pyramid is generally performed first at the most coarse level and then preceding to the most fine level. A jet is extracted on the coarsest Gauss level of the actual image frame I_(n+1) at the position X_(n+1) using the damped linear motion estimation X_(n+1) = (X_n + D_n) as described above, and compared to the corresponding

jet computed on the coarsest Gauss level of the previous image frame. From these two jets, the disparity is determined, i.e., the 2D vector R pointing from X_(n+1) to that position that corresponds best to the jet from the previous frame. This new position is assigned to X_(n+1). The disparity calculation is described below in more detail. The position on the next finer Gauss level of the actual image (being 2*X_(n+1)), corresponding to the position X_(n+1) on the coarsest Gauss level is the starting point for the disparity computation on this next finer level. The jet extracted at this point is compared to the corresponding jet calculated on the same Gauss level of the previous image frame. This process is repeated for all Gauss levels until the finest resolution level is reached, or until the Gauss level is reached which is specified for determining the position of the node corresponding to the previous frame's position.

Two representative levels of the Gaussian image pyramid are shown in FIG. 10, a coarser level 94above , a finer level 96 below. Each jet is assumed to have filter responses for two frequency levels. Starting at

position 1 on the coarser Gauss level, X_(n+1)=X_n+D_n, a first disparity move using only the lowest frequency jet coefficients leads to position 2. A second disparity move by using all jet coefficients of both frequency levels leads to position 3, the final position on this Gauss level. Position 1 on the finer Gauss level corresponds to position 3 on the coarser level with the coordinates being doubled. The disparity move sequence is repeated, and position 3 on the finest Gauss level is the final position of the tracked landmark. For more accurate tracking, the number of Gauss and frequency levels may be increased.

After the new position of the tracked node in the actual image frame has been determined, the jets on all Gauss levels are computed at this position. A stored array of jets that was computed for the previous frame, representing the tracked node, is then replaced by a new array of jets computed for the current frame.

Use of the Gauss image pyramid has two main advantages: First, movements of nodes are much smaller in terms of pixels on a coarser level than in the original image, which makes tracking possible by

performing only a local move instead of an exhaustive search in a large image region. Second, the computation of jet components is much faster for lower frequencies, because the computation is performed with a small kernel window on a down sampled image, rather than on a large kernel window on the original resolution image.

Note, that the correspondence level may be chosen dynamically, e.g., in the case of tracking facial features, correspondence level may be chosen dependent on the actual size of the face. Also the size of the Gauss image pyramid may be alter through the tracking process, i.e., the size may be increased when motion gets faster, and decreased when motion gets slower. Typically, the maximal node movement on the coarsest Gauss level is limited 4 pixels. Also note that the motion estimation is often performed only on the coarsest level.

The computation of the displacement vector between two given jets on the same Gauss level (the disparity vector), is now described. To compute the displacement between two consecutive frames, a method is used which was originally developed for disparity estimation in

stereo images, based on D. J. Fleet and A. D. Jepson. Computation of component image velocity from local phase information. In International Journal of Computer Vision, volume 5, issue 1, pages 77-104. 1990. and W. M. Theimer and H. A. Mallot. Phase-based binocular vergence control and depth reconstruction using active vision. In CVGIP: Image Undersanding, volume 60, issue 3, pages 343-358. November 1994.

The strong variation of the phases of the complex filter responses is used explicitly to compute the displacement with subpixel accuracy (Wiskott, L., "Labeled Graphs and Dynamic Link Matching for Face Recognition and Scene Analysis", Verlag Harri Deutsch, Thun-Frankfurt am Main, Reihe Physik 53 (PhD thesis, 1995). By writing the response J to the jth Gabor filter in terms of amplitude a_j and phase j, a similarity function can be defined as

$$S(J,J',d)=\frac{\sum_j a_j a'_j \cos(\phi_j-\phi_{j'}-d\cdot k_j)}{\sqrt{\sum_j a_j^2 \sum_{j'} a_{j'}^{\prime 2}}} \qquad (6)$$

Let J and J' be two jets at positions X and X'=X+d, the displacement d may be found by maximizing the

similarity S with respect to d, the k_j being the wavevectors associated with the filter generating J_j. Because the estimation of d is only precise for small displacements, i.e., large overlap of the Gabor jets, large displacement vectors are treated as a first estimate only, and the process is repeated in the following manner. First, only the filter responses of the lowest frequency level are used resulting in a first estimate d_1. Next, this estimate is executed and the jet J is recomputed at the position X_1=X+d_1, which is closer to the position X' of jet J'. Then, the lowest two frequency levels are used for the estimation of the displacement d_2, and the jet J is recomputed at the position X_2 = X_1 + d_2. This is iterated until the highest frequency level used is reached, and the final disparity d between the two start jets J and J' is given as the sum d = d_1 + d_2 + ... Accordingly, displacements of up to half the wavelength of the kernel with the lowest frequency may be computed (see Wiskott 1995, supra).

Although the displacements are determined using floating point numbers, jets may be extracted

(i.e., computed by convolution) at (integer) pixel positions only, resulting in a systematic rounding error. To compensate for this subpixel error Δd, the phases of the complex Gabor filter responses should be shifted according to

$$\Delta\phi_j = \Delta d \cdot k_j \qquad (7)$$

so that the jets will appear as if they were extracted at the correct subpixel position. Accordingly, the Gabor jets may be tracked with subpixel accuracy without any further accounting of rounding errors. Note that Gabor jets provide a substantial advantage in image processing because the problem of subpixel accuracy is more difficult to address in most other image processing methods.

Tracking error may be detected by determining whether a confidence or similarity value is smaller than a predetermined threshold (block 84 of FIG. 9). The similarity (or confidence) value **S** may be calculated to indicate how well the two image regions in the two image frames correspond to each other simultaneous with the calculation of the displacement of a node between consecutive image frames. Typically,

the confidence value is close to 1, indicating good correspondence. If the confidence value is not close to 1, either the corresponding point in the image has not been found (e.g., because the frame rate was too low compared to the velocity of the moving object), or this image region has changed so drastically from one image frame to the next, that the correspondence is no longer well defined (e.g., for the node tracking the pupil of the eye the eyelid has been closed). Nodes having a confidence value below a certain threshold may be switched off.

A tracking error also may be detected when certain geometrical constraints are violated (block 86). If many nodes are tracked simultaneously, the geometrical configuration of the nodes may be checked for consistency. Such geometrical constraints may be fairly loose, e.g., when facial features are tracked, the nose must be between the eyes and the mouth. Alternatively, such geometrical constraints may be rather accurate, e.g., a model containing the precise shape information of the tracked face. For intermediate accuracy, the constraints may be based on

a flat plane model. In the flat plane model, the nodes of the face graph are assumed to be on a flat plane. For image sequences that start with the frontal view, the tracked node positions may be compared to the corresponding node positions of the frontal graph transformed by an affine transformation to the actual frame. The 6 parameters of the optimal affine transformation are found by minimizing the least squares error in the node positions. Deviations between the tracked node positions and the transformed node positions are compared to a threshold. The nodes having deviations larger than the threshold are switched off. The parameters of the affine transformation may be used to determine the pose and relative scale (compared to the start graph) simultaneously (block 88). Thus, this rough flat plane model assures that tracking errors may not grow beyond a predetermined threshold.

If a tracked node is switched off because of a tracking error, the node may be reactivated at the correct position (block 90), advantageously using bunch graphs that include different poses and tracking

continued from the corrected position (block 92). After a tracked node has been switched off, the system may wait until a predefined pose is reached for which a pose specific bunch graph exists. Otherwise, if only a frontal bunchgraph is stored, the system must until the frontal pose is reached to correct any tracking errors. The stored bunch of jets may be compared to the image region surrounding the fit position (e.g., from the flat plane model), which works in the same manner as tracking, except that instead of comparing with the jet of the previous image frame, the comparison is repeated with all jets of the bunch of examples, and the most similar one is taken. Because the facial features are known, e.g., the actual pose, scale, and even the rough position, graph matching or an exhaustive searching in the image and/or pose space is not needed and node tracking correction may be performed in real time.

For tracking correction, bunch graphs are not needed for many different poses and scales because rotation in the image plane as well as scale may be taken into account by transforming either the local image region or the jets of the bunch graph accordingly

as shown in FIG. 11. In addition to the frontal pose, bunch graphs need to be created only for rotations in depth.

The speed of the reinitialization process may be increased by taking advantage of the fact that the identity of the tracked person remains the same during an image sequence. Accordingly, in an initial learning session, a first sequence of the person may be taken with the person exhibiting a full repertoire of frontal facial expressions. This first sequence may be tracked with high accuracy using the tracking and correction scheme described above based on a large generalized bunch graph that contains knowledge about many different persons. This process may be performed offline and generates a new personalized bunch graph. The personalized bunch graph then may be used for tracking this person at a fast rate in real time because the personalized bunch graph is much smaller than the larger, generalized bunch graph.

The speed of the reinitialization process also may be increased by using a partial bunch graph reinitialization. A partial bunch graph contains only a

subset of the nodes of a full bunch graph. The subset may be as small as only a single node.

A pose estimation bunch graph makes use of a family of two-dimensional bunch graphs defined in the image plane. The different graphs within one family account for different poses and/or scales of the head. The landmark finding process attempts to match each bunch graph from the family to the input image in order to determine the pose or size of the head in the image. An example of such pose-estimation procedure is shown in FIG. 12. The first step of the pose estimation is equivalent to that of the regular landmark finding. The image (block 98)is transformed (blocks 100 and 102) in order to use the graph similarity functions. Then, instead of only one, a family of three bunch graphs is used. The first bunch graph contains only the frontal pose faces (equivalent to the frontal view described above), and the other two bunch graphs contain quarter-rotated faces (one representing rotations to the left and one to the right). As before, the initial positions for each of the graphs is in the upper left corner, and the positions of the graphs are scanned on

the image and the position and graph returning the highest similarity after the landmark finding is selected (blocks 104-114)

After initial matching for each graph, the similarities of the final positions are compared (block 116). The graph that best corresponds to the pose given on the image will have the highest similarity. In FIG. 12, the left-rotated graph provides the best fit to the image, as indicated by its similarity (block 118). Depending on resolution and degree of rotation of the face in the picture, similarity of the correct graph and graphs for other poses would vary, becoming very close when the face is about half way between the two poses for which the graphs have been defined. By creating bunch graphs for more poses, a finer pose estimation procedure may be implemented that would discriminate between more degrees of head rotation and handle rotations in other directions (e.g. up or down).

In order to robustly find a face at an arbitrary distance from the camera, a similar approach may be used in which two or three different bunch graphs each having different scales may be used. The face in the

The graph matching process may be formulated as a coarse-to-fine approach that first utilizes graphs with fewer nodes and kernels and then in subsequent steps utilizes more dense graphs. The coarse-to-fine approach is particularly suitable if high precision localization of the feature points in certain areas of the face is desired. Thus, computational effort is saved by adopting a hierarchical approach in which landmark finding is first performed on a coarser resolution, and subsequently the adapted graphs are checked at a higher resolution to analyze certain regions in finer detail.

Further, the computational workload may be easily split on a multi-processor machine such that once the coarse regions are found, a few child processes start working in parallel each on its own part of the whole image. At the end of the child processes, the processes communicate the feature coordinates that they located to the master process, which appropriately scales and combines them to fit back into the original image thus considerably reducing the total computation time.

classes. The feature class information is more texture based and, by comparing the local image region with a set of stored examples, may function using lower resolution and tracking accuracy then feature class information that is based solely on the node positions.

The facial sensing of the invention may be applied to the creation and animation of static and dynamic avatars as shown in FIG. 14. The avatar may be based on a generic facial model or based on a person specific facial model. The tracking and facial expression recognition may be used for the incarnation the avatar with the person's features.

The generic facial model may be adapted to a representative number of individuals and may be adapted to perform realistic animation and rendering of a wide range of facial features and/or expressions. The generic a model may be obtained by the following techniques.

1. Mono-camera systems may be used (T. Akimoto et al. 1993) to produce a realistic avatar for use in low-end tele-immersion systems. Face profile information of

individuals, as seen from sagital and coronal planes, may be merged to obtain the avatar.

2. Stereo-camera systems are able to perform accurate 3-D measurements when the cameras are fully calibrated (camera parameters are computed through a calibration process). An individual facial model may then be obtained by fitting a generic facial model to the obtained 3-D data. Because stereo algorithms do not provide accurate information on non-textured areas, projection of active-textured light may be used.

3. Feature-based stereo techniques where markers are used on the individual face to compute precise 3-D positions of the markers. 3-D information is then used to fit a generic model.

4. 3-dimensionnal digitizers in which a sensor or locating device is moved over each surface point to be measured.

5. Active structured light where patterns are projected and the resulting video stream is processed to extract 3D measurements.

6. Laser-based surface scanning devices (such as those developed by Cyberware, Inc) that provide accurate face measurements.

7. A combination of the previous techniques.

These differing techniques are not of equal convenience to the user. Some are able to obtain measurements on the individual in a one-time process (the face being in a desired posture for the duration of the measurement), while others need a collection of samples and are more cumbersome to use.

A generic three-dimensional head model for a specific person can be generated using two facial images showing a frontal and a profile view. Facial sensing enables efficiently and robustly generation of the 3-D head model.

Facial contour extraction is performed together with the localization of the person's eyes, nose, mouth and chin. This feature location information may be obtained by using the using the elastic bunch graph technique in combination with hierarchical matching to automatically extract facial features as shown in FIG. 14. The feature location information may then be

combined (see T. Akimoto and Y. Suenaga. Automatic Creation of 3D Facial Models. In IEEE Computer Graphics & Applications, pages 16-22. September 1993.) to produce a 3D model of the person's head. A generic three dimensional head model is adapted so that its proportions are related to the image's measurements. Finally, both side and front images may be combined to obtain a better texture model for the avatar, i.e. the front view is used to texture map the front of the model and the side view is used for the side of the model. Facial sensing improves this technique because extracted features may be labeled (known points may be defined in the profile) so that the two images need not be taken simultaneously.

An avatar image may be animated by the following common techniques (see F. I. Parke and K. Waters. Computer Facial Animation. A K Peters, Ltd. Wellesley, Massachusetts, 1996).

1. Key framing and geometric interpolation, where a number of key poses and expressions are defined. Geometric interpolation is then used between the key frames to provide animation. Such a system is

frequently referred to as a performance-based (or performance-driven) model.

2. Direct parameterization which directly maps expressions and pose to a set of parameters that are then used to drive the model.

3. Pseudo-muscle models which simulate muscle actions using geometric deformations.

4. Muscle-based models where muscles and skin are modeled using physical models.

5. 2-D and 3-D Morphing which use 2D morphing between images in a video stream to produce 2D animation. A set of landmarks are identified and used to warp between two images of a sequence. Such a technique can be extended to 3D (See, F. F. Pighin, J. Hecker, D. Lischinski, R. Szeliski, and D. H. Salesin. Synthesizing Realistic Facial Expressions from Photographs. In SIGGRAPH 98 Conference Proceedings, pages 75-84. July 1998.).

6. Other approaches such as control points and finite element models.

For these techniques, facial sensing enhances the animation process by providing automatic extraction and

characterization of facial features. Extracted features may be used to interpolate expressions in the case of key framing and interpolation models, or to select parameters for direct parameterized models or pseudo-muscles or muscles models. In the case of 2-D and 3-D morphing, facial sensing may be used to automatically select features on a face providing the appropriate information to perform the geometric transformation.

An example of an avatar animation that uses facial feature tracking and classification may be shown with respect to FIG. 15. During the training phase the individual is prompted for a series of predetermined facial expressions (block 120), and sensing is used to track the features (block 122). At predetermined locations, jets and image patches are extracted for the various expressions (block 124). Image patches surrounding facial features are collected along with the jets 126 extracted from these features. These jets are used later to classify or tag facial features 128. This is done by using these jets to generate a

personalized bunch graph and by applying the classification method described above.

As shown in FIG. 16, for animation of an avatar, the system transmits all image patches 128, as well as the image of the whole face 130 (the "face frame") minus the parts shown in the image patches to a remote site (blocks 132 & 134). The software for the animation engine also may need to be transmitted. The sensing system then observes the user's face and facial sensing is applied to determine which of the image patches is most similar to the current facial expression (blocks 136 & 138). The image tags are transmitted to the remote site (block 140) allowing the animation engine to assemble the face 142 using the correct image patches.

To fit the image patches smoothly into the image frame, Gaussian blurring may be employed. For realistic rendering, local image morphing may be needed because the animation may not be continuous in the sense that a succession of images may be presented as imposed by the sensing. The morphing may be realized using linear interpolation of corresponding points on

the image space. To create intermediate images, linear interpolation is applied using the following equations:

$$P_i = (2-i)P_i+(i-1)P_2 \quad (7)$$

$$I_i = (2-i)I_1 + (i-1)I_2 \quad (8)$$

where P_1 and P_2 are corresponding points in the images I_1 and I_2, and I_i is the i^{th} interpolated image: with $1 \leq i \leq 2$. Note that for process efficient, the image interpolation may be implemented using a pre-computed hash table for P_i and I_i. The number and accuracy of points used, and their accuracy, the interpolated facial model generally determines the resulting image quality.

Thus, the reconstructed face in the remote display may be composed by assembling pieces of images corresponding to the detected expressions in the learning step. Accordingly, the avatar exhibits features corresponding to the person commanding the animation. Thus, at initialization, a set of cropped images corresponding to each tracked facial feature and a "face container" as the resulting image of the face

after each feature is removed. The animation is started and facial sensing is used to generate specific tags which are transmitted as described previously. Decoding occurs by selecting image pieces associated with the transmitted tag, e.g., the image of the mouth labeled with a tag "smiling-mouth" 146 (FIG. 16).

A more advanced level of avatar animation may be reached when the aforementioned dynamic texture generation is integrated with more conventional techniques of volume morphing as shown in FIG. 17). To achieve volume morphing, the location of the node positions may be used to drive control points on a mesh 150. Next, the textures 152 dynamically generated using tags are then mapped onto the mesh to generate a realistic head image 154. An alternative to using the sensed node positions as drivers of control points on the mesh is to use the tags to select local morph targets. A morph target is a local mesh configuration that has been determined for the different facial expressions and gestures for which sample jets have been collected. These local mesh geometries can be determined by stereo vision techniques. The use of

morph targets is further developed in the following references community (see, J. R. Kent, W. E. Carlson, and R. E. Parent. Shape Transformation for Polyhedral Objects. In SIGGRAPH 92 Conference Proceedings, volume 26, pages 47-54. August 1992; Pighin et al. 1998, supra).

A useful extension to the vision-based avatar animation is to integrate the facial sensing with speech analysis in order to synthesize the correct lip motion as shown in FIG. 18. The lip synching technique is particularly useful to map lip motions resulting from speech onto an avatar. It is also helpful as a back-up in case the vision-based lip tracking fails.

Although the foregoing discloses the preferred embodiments of the present invention, it is understood that those skilled in the art may make various changes to the preferred embodiments without departing from the scope of the invention. The invention is defined only the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for feature sensing on a sequence of image frames, comprising:

a step for transforming each image frame using a wavelet transformation to generate a transformed image frame;

a step for initializing node locations associated with wavelets jets of a model graph to the transformed image frame by moving the model graph across the transformed image frame and placing the model graph at a location in the transformed image frame of maximum jet similarity between the wavelet jets at the node locations and the transformed image frame;

a step for tracking the location of one or more node locations of the model graph between image frames; and

a step for reinitializing a tracked node if the node's position deviates beyond a predetermined position constraint between image frames.

2. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 1, wherein the model graph used in the initializing step is based on a predetermined pose.

3. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 1, wherein the tracking step tracks the node locations using elastic bunch graph matching.

4. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 1, wherein the tracking step uses linear position prediction to predict node locations in a subsequent image frame and the reinitializing step reinitializes a node location based on a deviation from the predicted node location that is greater than a predetermined threshold deviation.

5. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 1, wherein the predetermined position constraint is based on a geometrical position constraint associated with relative positions between the node locations.

6. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 1, wherein the node locations are transmitted to a remote site for animating an avatar image.

7. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 1, wherein the tracking step includes determining a facial characteristic.

8. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 7, further comprising transmitting the node locations and facial characteristics to a remote site for animating an avatar image having facial characteristics which are based upon the facial characteristics determined by the tracking step.

9. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 7, wherein the facial characteristic determined by the tracking step is whether mouth is open or closed.

10. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 7, wherein the facial characteristic determined by the tracking step is whether eyes are open or closed.

11. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 7, wherein the facial characteristic determined by the tracking step is whether tongue is visible in the mouth.

12. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 7, wherein the facial characteristic determined by the tracking step is based on facial wrinkles detected in the image.

13. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 7, wherein the facial characteristic determined by the tracking step is based on hair type.

14. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 7, wherein each facial characteristic is associated by training with an image tag that

identifies an image segment of the image frame that is associated with the facial characteristic.

15. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 14, wherein the image segments identified by the associated image tag are morphed into an avatar image.

16. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 14, wherein the node locations and feature tags are used for volume morphing the corresponding image segments into a three-dimensional image.

17. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 7, wherein the model graph comprises 18 location nodes associated with distinguishing features on a human face.

18. A method for feature sensing as defined in claim 17, wherein the 18 node locations of the face are associated with, respectively,

a right eye pupil;

a left eye pupil;

a top of a nose;

a right corner of a right eyebrow;

a left corner of the right eyebrow;

a left corner of a left eyebrow;

a right nostril;

a tip of the nose;

a left nostril;

a right corner of a mouth;

a center of an upper lip;

a left corner of the mouth;

a center of a lower lip;

a bottom of a right ear;

a top of the right ear;

a top of a left ear; and

a bottom of the left ear.

19. A method for facial feature sensing as defined in claim 1, wherein the node locations tracking step includes lip synching based on audio signals associated with movement of the node locations of a mouth generating the audio signals.

20. A method for individualizing a head model based on facial feature finding, wherein facial feature finding is based on elastic bunch graph matching.

21. A method for individualizing a head model as defined in claim 20, wherein the matching is performed using a coarse-to-fine approach.

22. Apparatus for feature sensing on a sequence of image frames, comprising:

means for transforming each image frame using a wavelet transformation to generate a transformed image frame;

means for initializing node locations associated with wavelets jets of a model graph to the transformed image frame by moving the model graph across the transformed image frame and placing the model graph at a location in the transformed image frame of maximum jet similarity between the wavelet jets at the node locations and the transformed image frame;

means for tracking the location of one or more node locations of the model graph between image frames; and

means for reinitializing a tracked node if the node's position deviates beyond a predetermined position constraint between image frames.

23. Apparatus for feature sensing as defined in claim 22, further comprising:

means for determining a facial characteristic; and

means for animating an avatar image having facial characteristics which are based upon the facial characteristics generated by the determining means.

24. Apparatus for feature sensing as defined in claim 23, wherein the model graph comprises 18 location nodes associated with distinguishing features on a human face.

25. A model graph for facial image analysis comprising 18 location nodes associated with distinguishing features on a human face.

26. A model graph for facial image analysis as defined in claim 25, wherein the 18 node locations of the face are associated with, respectively,

a right eye pupil;

a left eye pupil;

a top of a nose;

a right corner of a right eyebrow;

a left corner of the right eyebrow;

a left corner of a left eyebrow;

a right nostril;

a tip of the nose;

a left nostril;

a right corner of a mouth;

a center of an upper lip;

a left corner of the mouth;

a center of a lower lip;

a bottom of a right ear;

a top of the right ear;

a top of a left ear; and

a bottom of the left ear.

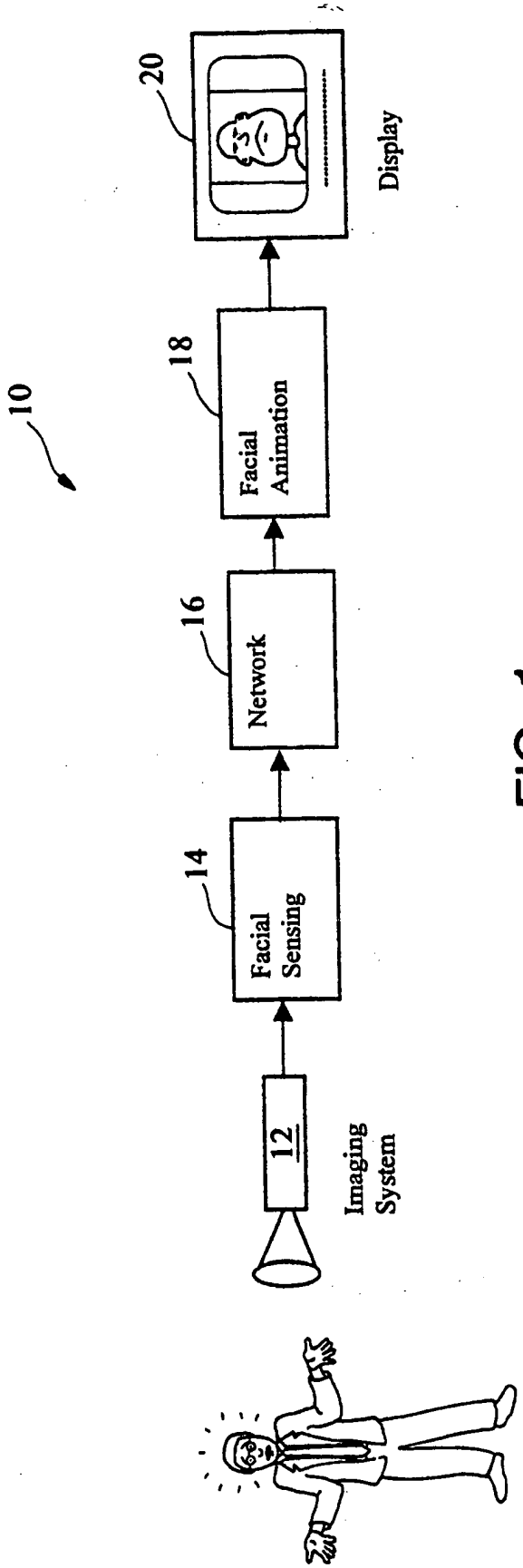

10
12
Imaging System
14
Facial Sensing
16
Network
18
Facial Animation
20
Display

FIG. 1

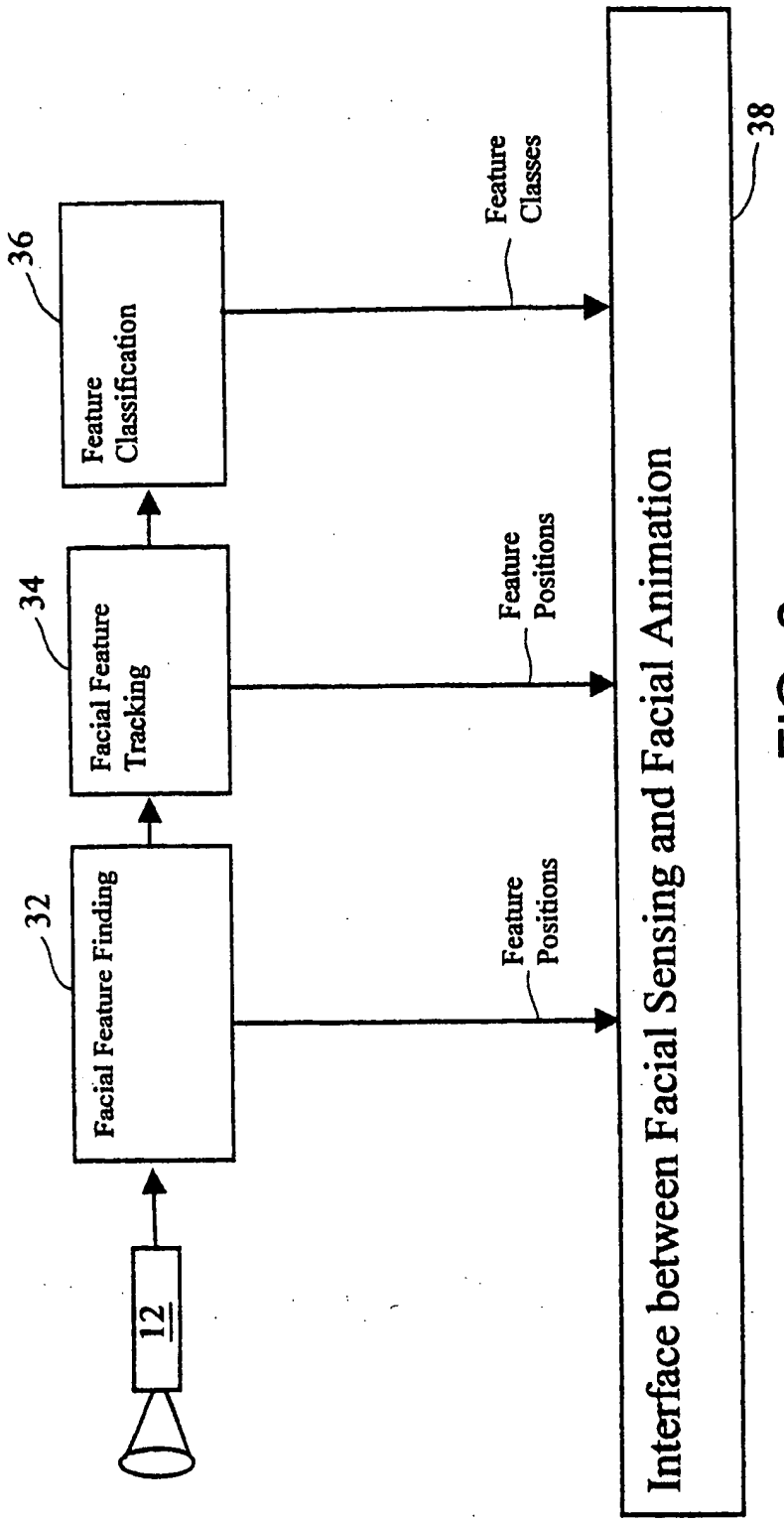

12
32
Facial Feature Finding
34
Facial Feature Tracking
36
Feature Classification
Feature Positions
Feature Positions
Feature Classes
38
Interface between Facial Sensing and Facial Animation

FIG. 2

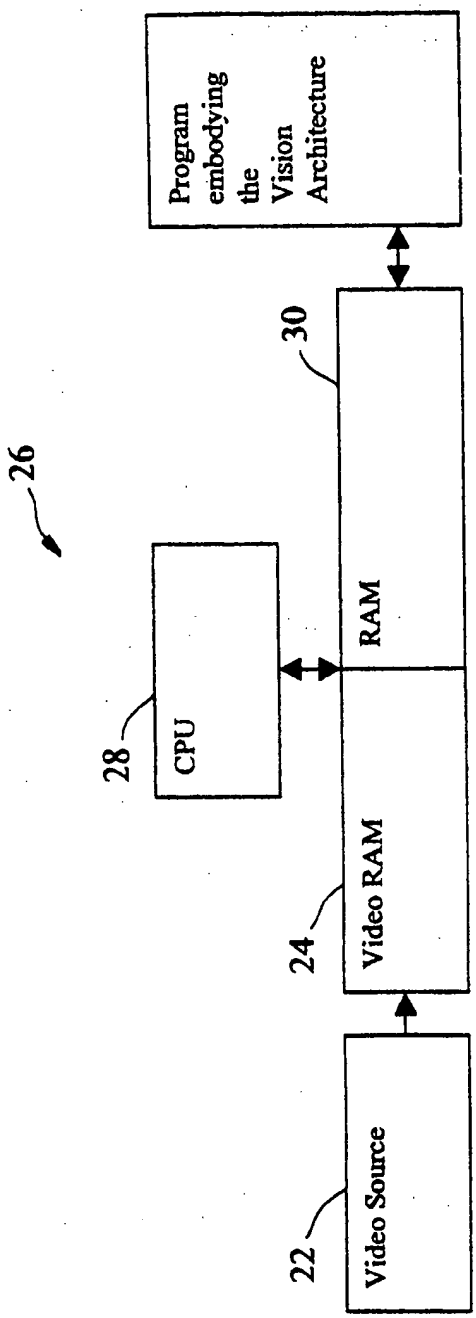

Program embodying the Vision Architecture
30
RAM
26
28
CPU
Video RAM
24
Video Source
22

FIG. 3

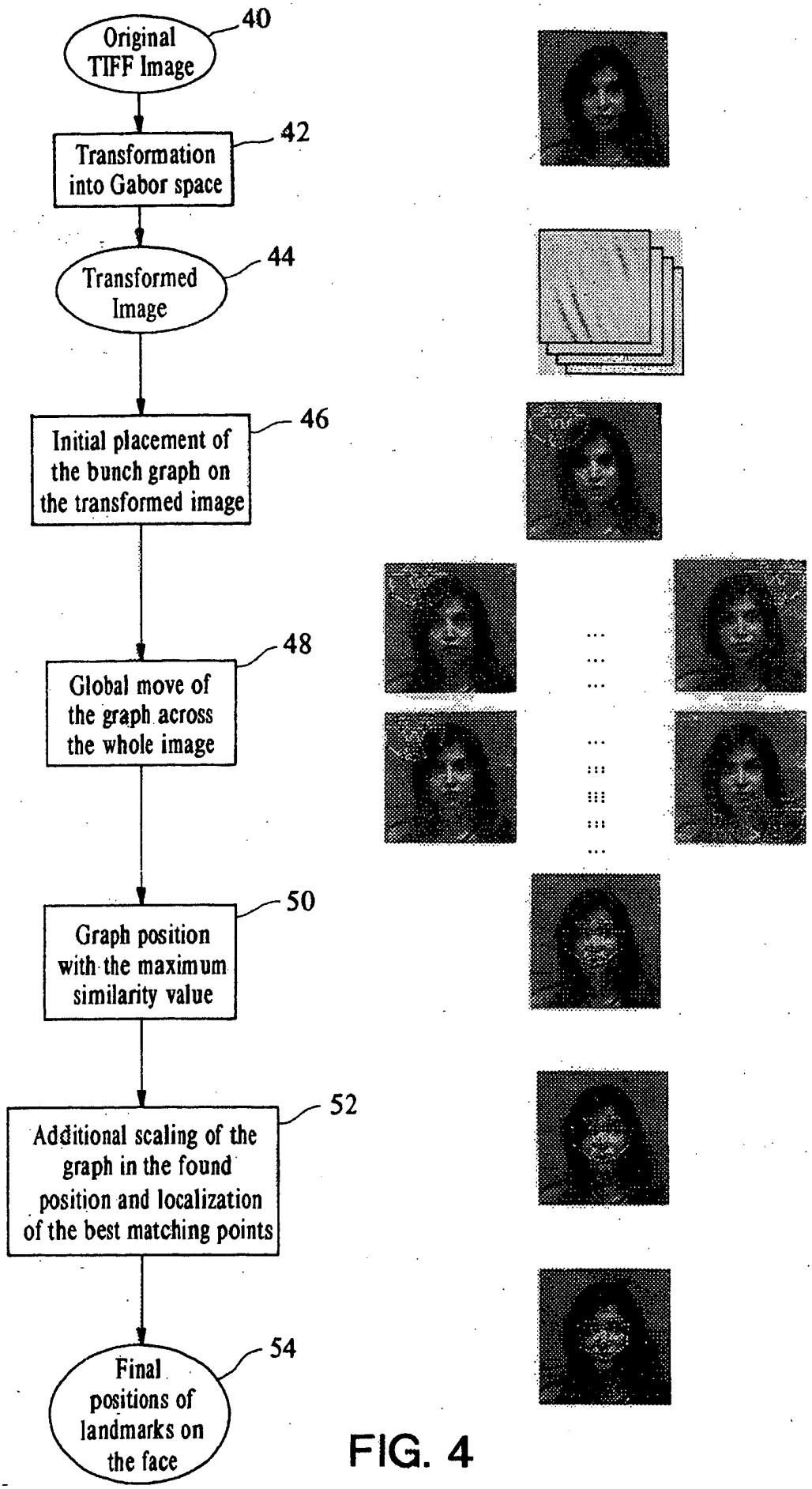

Original TIFF Image
40
Transformation into Gabor space
42
Transformed Image
44
Initial placement of the bunch graph on the transformed image
46
Global move of the graph across the whole image
48
Graph position with the maximum similarity value
50
Additional scaling of the graph in the found position and localization of the best matching points
52
Final positions of landmarks on the face
54

FIG. 4

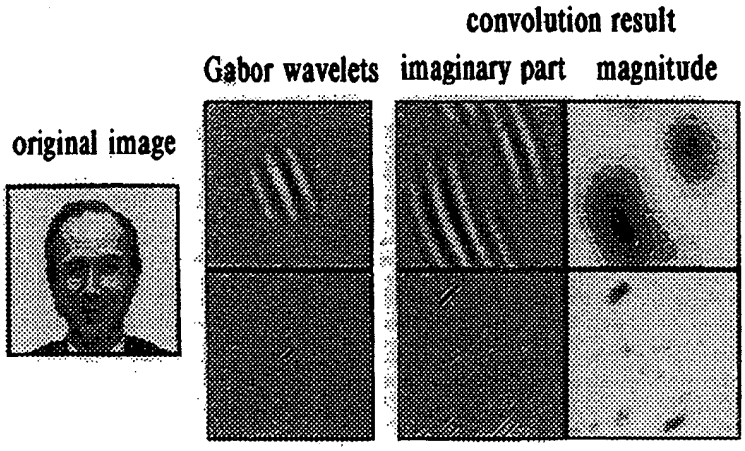

convolution result
Gabor wavelets
imaginary part
magnitude
original image

FIG. 5

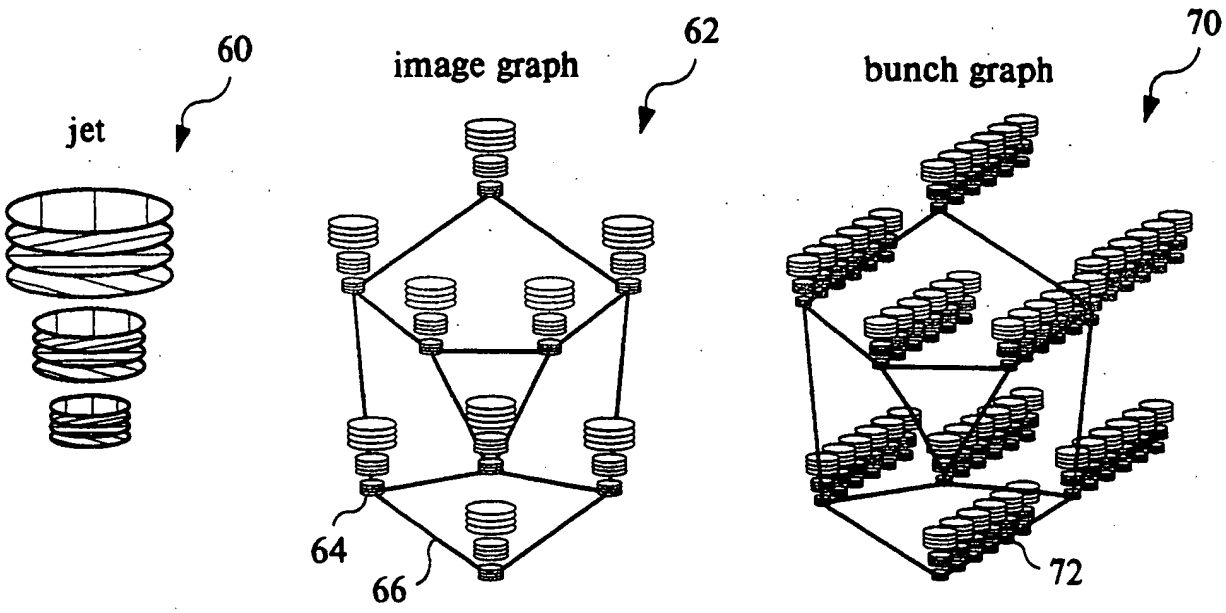

60
jet
62
image graph
70
bunch graph
64
66
72

FIG. 6

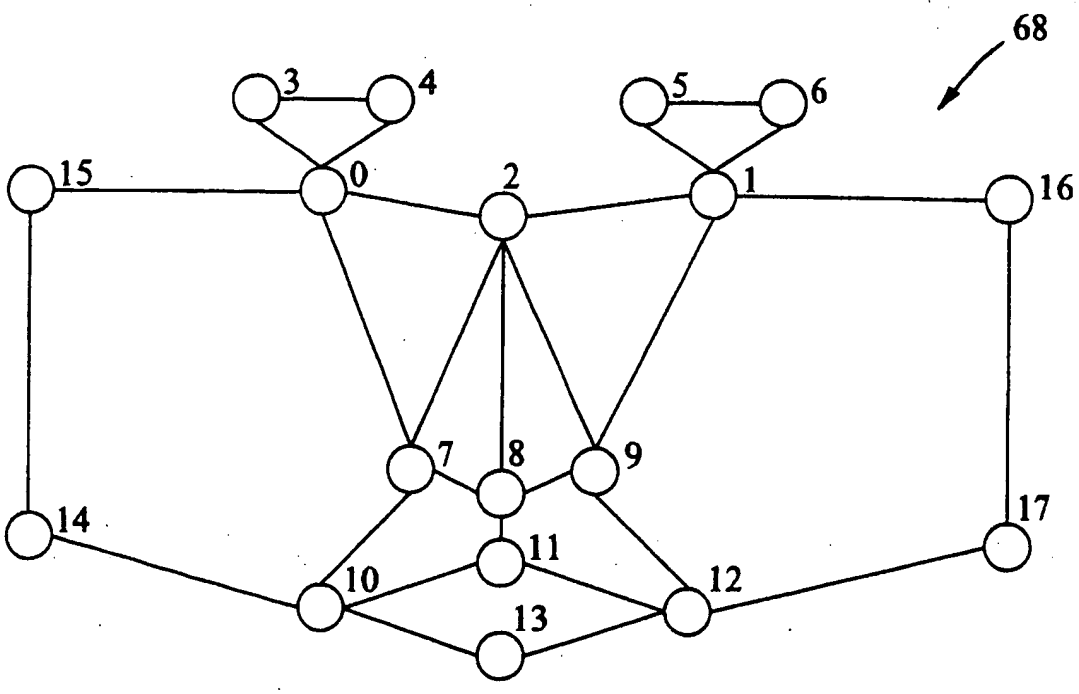

68
3
4
5
6
15
0
2
1
16
7
8
9
14
17
11
10
12
13

FIG. 7

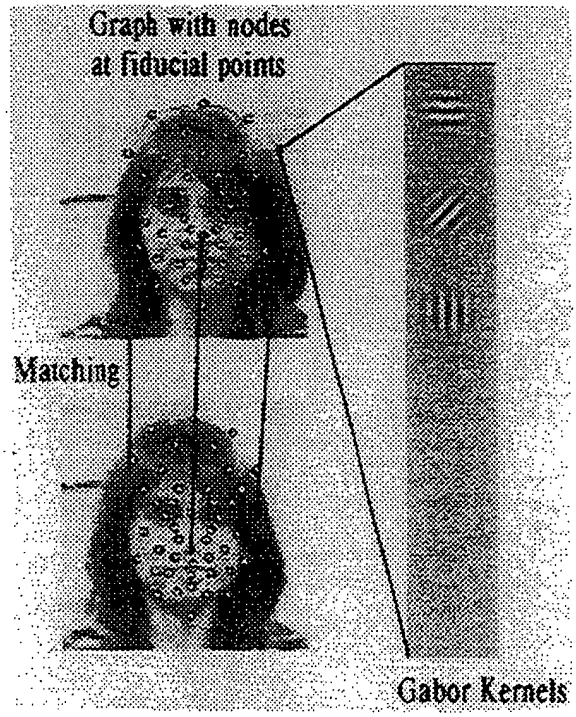

Graph with nodes
at fiducial points
Matching
Gabor Kernels

FIG. 8

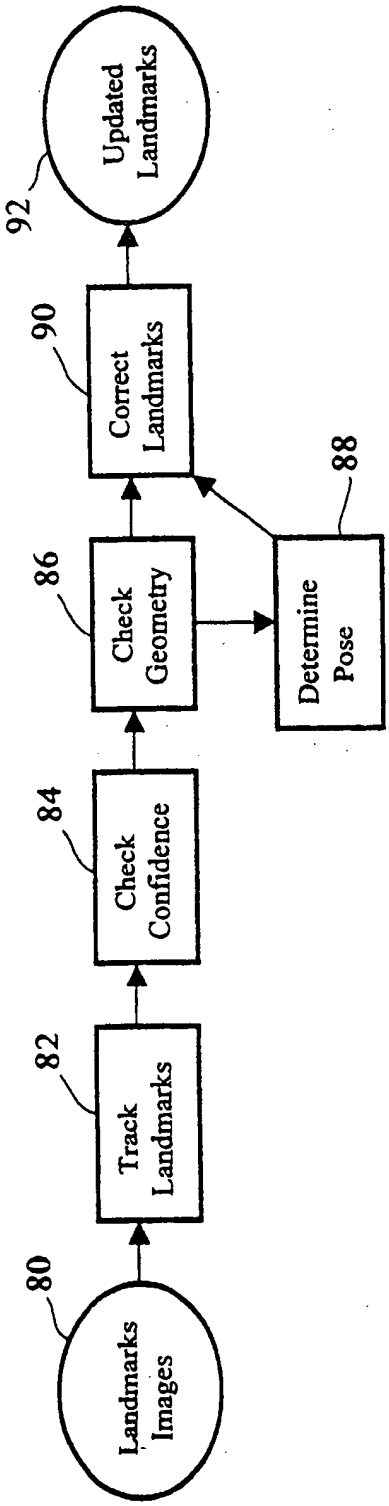

Landmarks Images
80
Track Landmarks
82
Check Confidence
84
Check Geometry
86
Determine Pose
88
Correct Landmarks
90
Updated Landmarks
92

FIG. 9

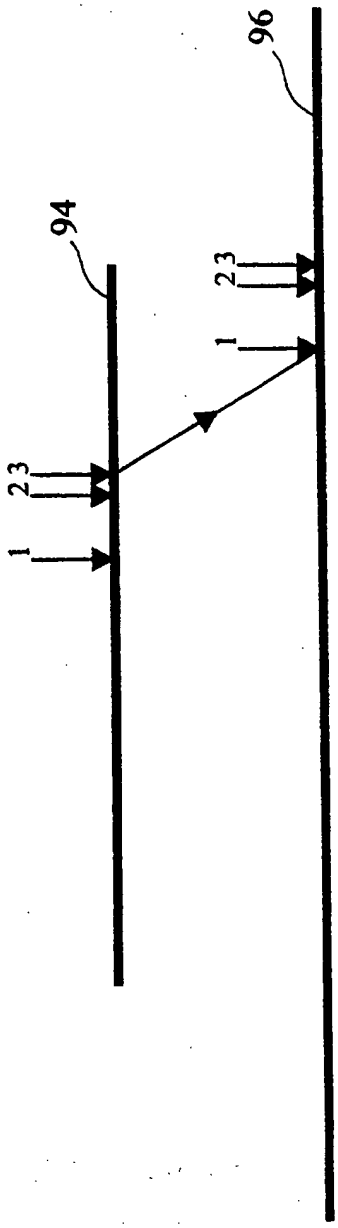
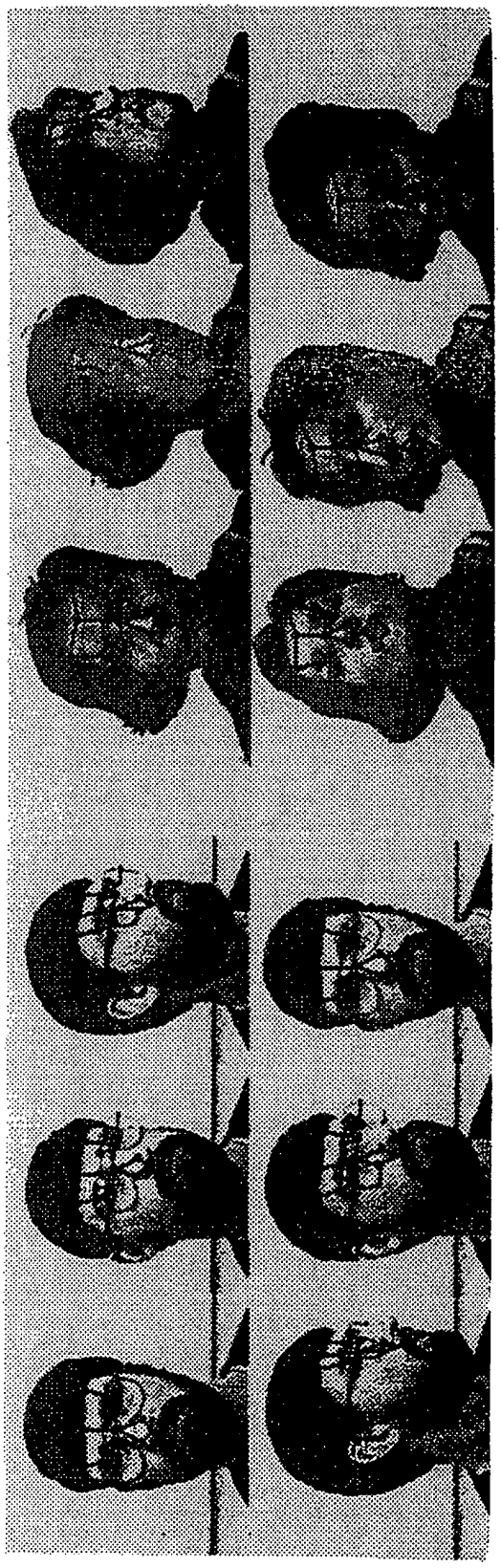
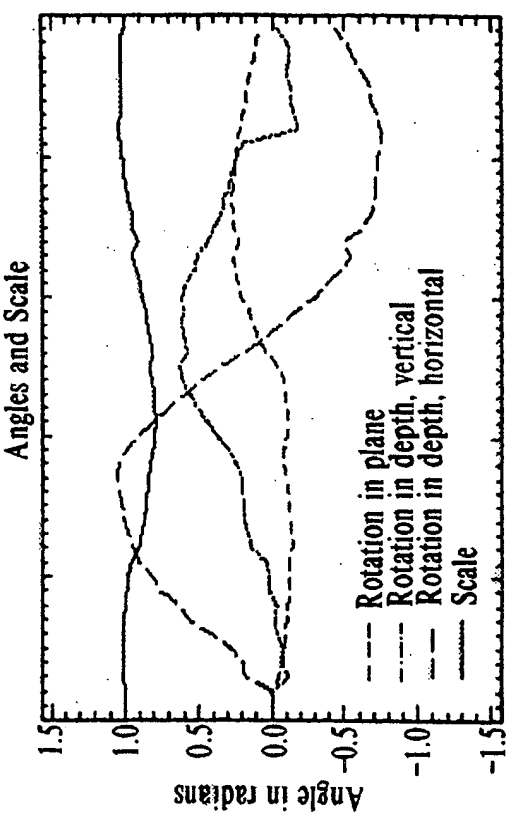

94
96
1
2 3
1
2 3

FIG. 10




Angles and Scale
Angle in radians
Frame number
Rotation in plane
Rotation in depth, vertical
Rotation in depth, horizontal
Scale
1.5
1.0
0.5
0.0
-0.5
-1.0
-1.5
0
10
20
30
40
50

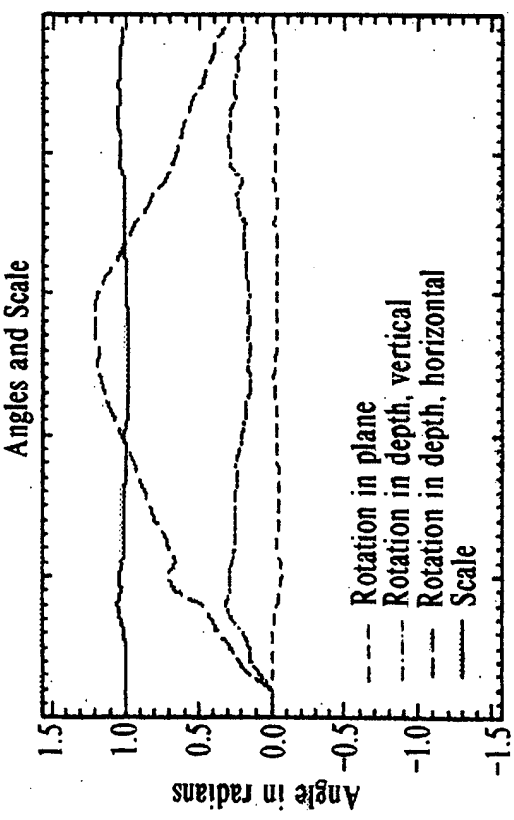
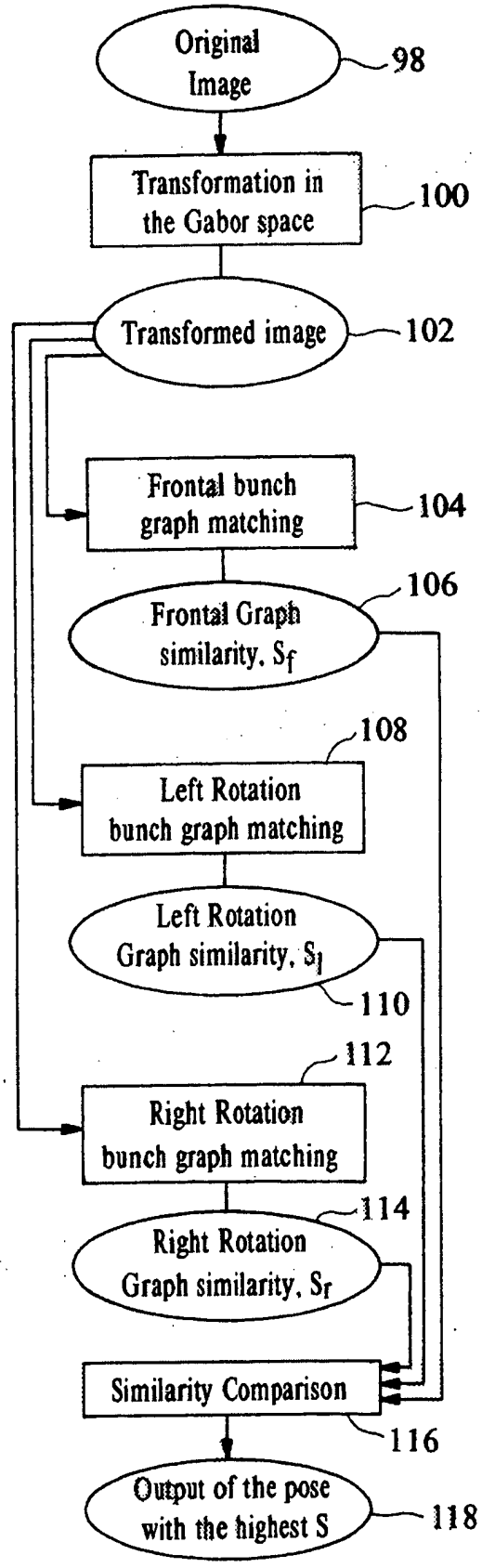

Angles and Scale
Angle in radians
Frame number
Rotation in plane
Rotation in depth, vertical
Rotation in depth, horizontal
Scale
1.5
1.0
0.5
0.0
-0.5
-1.0
-1.5
0
10
20
30
40
50

FIG. 11



Initial graph placement

Final graph placement

S_f=0.74

S_l=0.96

S_r=0.69

FIG. 12

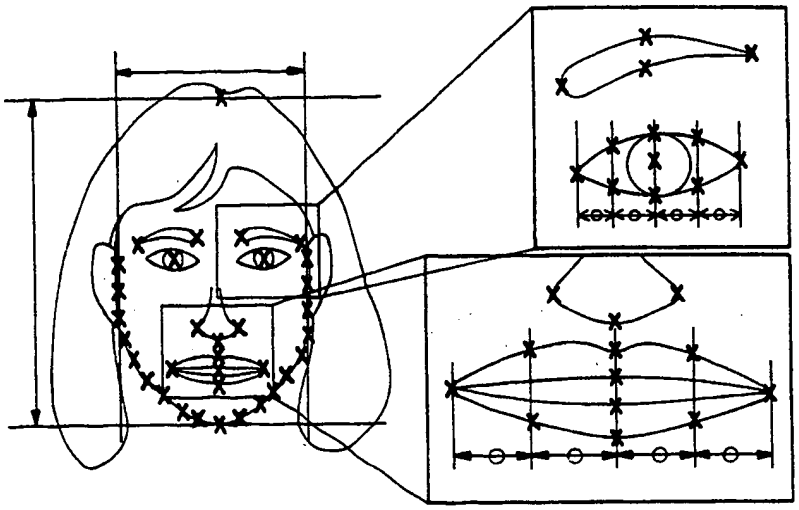


FIG. 13

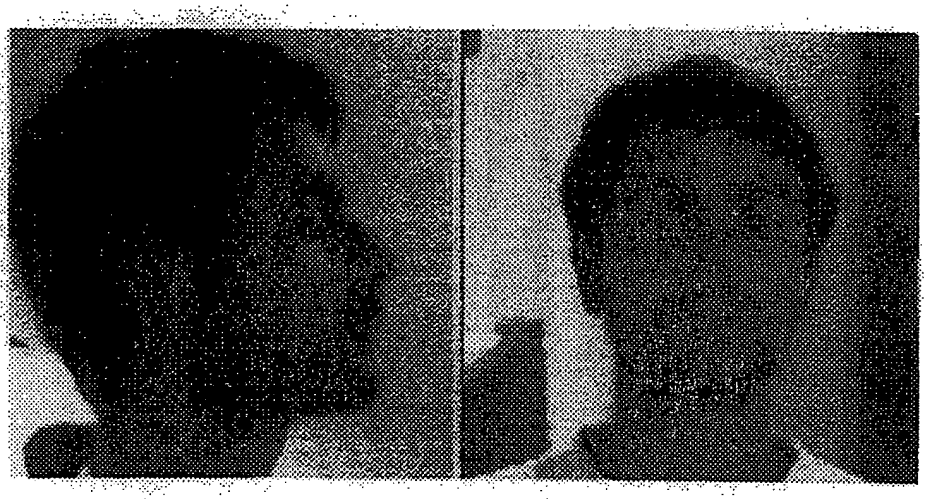


FIG. 14

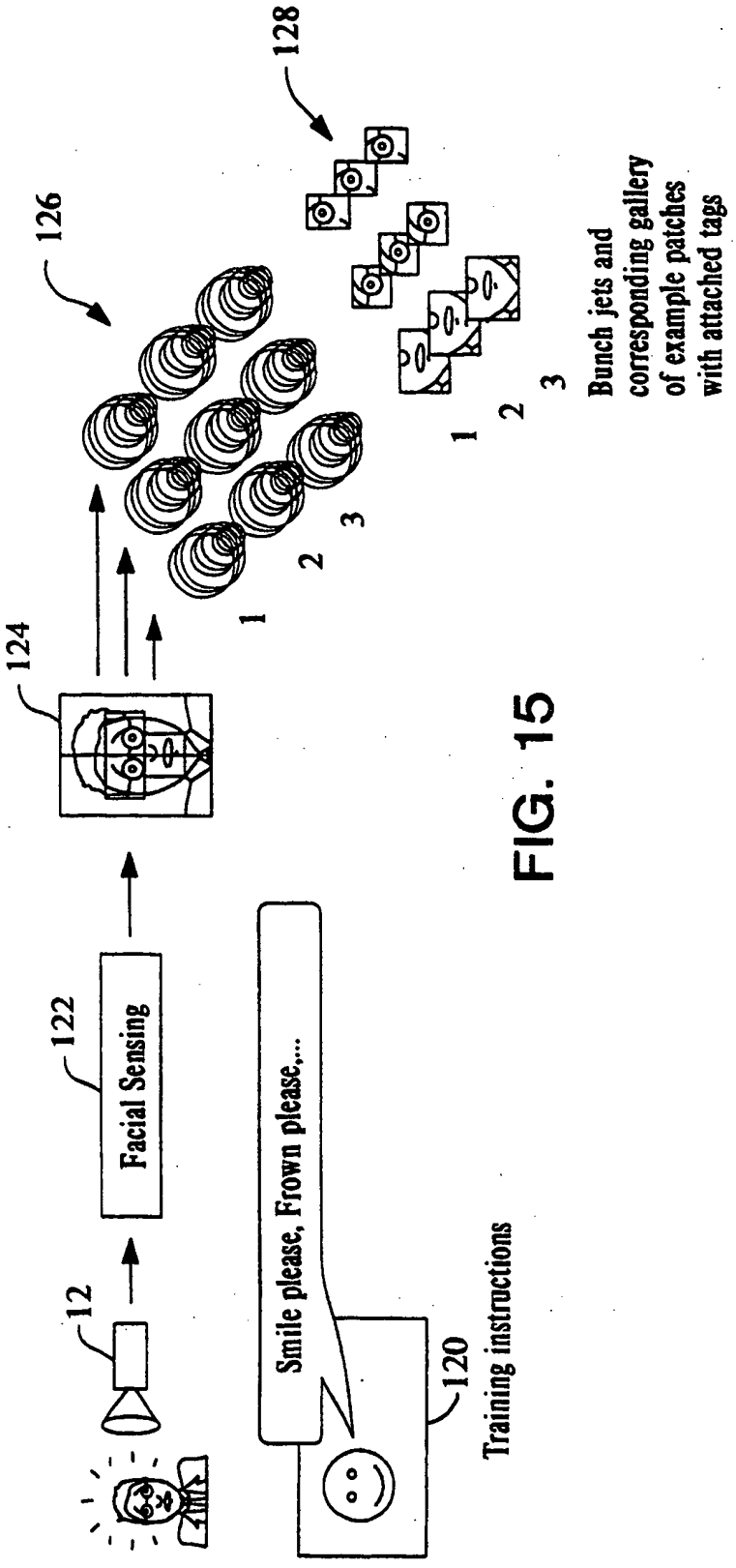

128
126
124
122
Facial Sensing
12
Smile please, Frown please,...
120
Training instructions
1
2
3
1
2
3
Bunch jets and
corresponding gallery
of example patches
with attached tags

FIG. 15

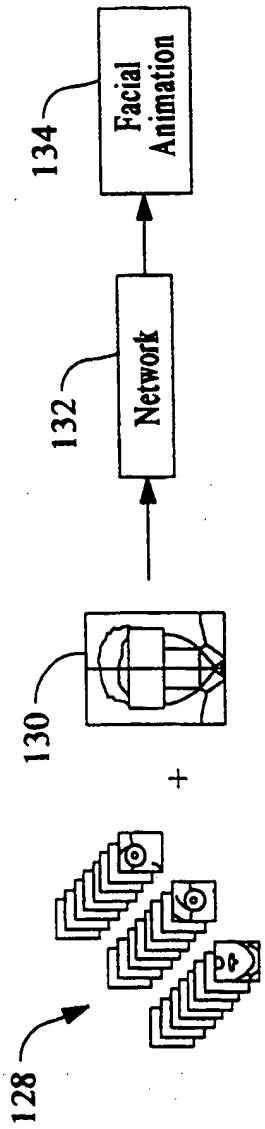


FIG. 16A

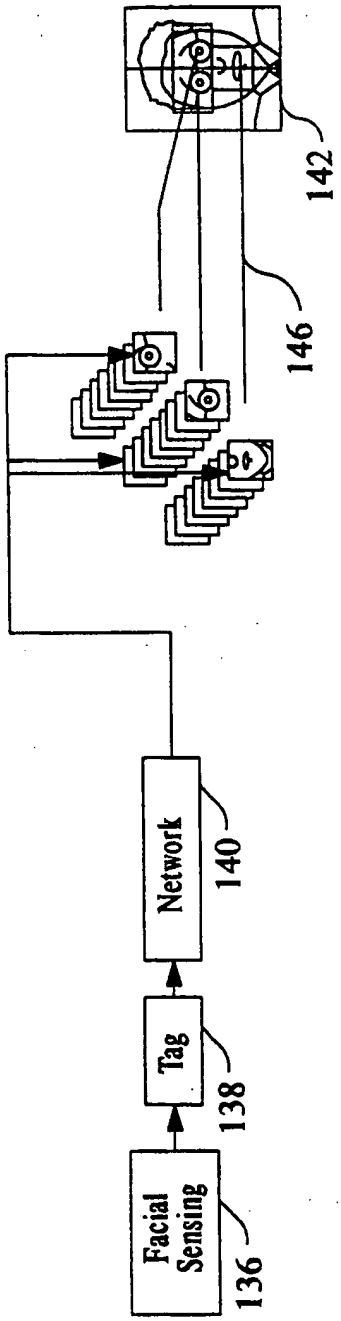


FIG. 16B

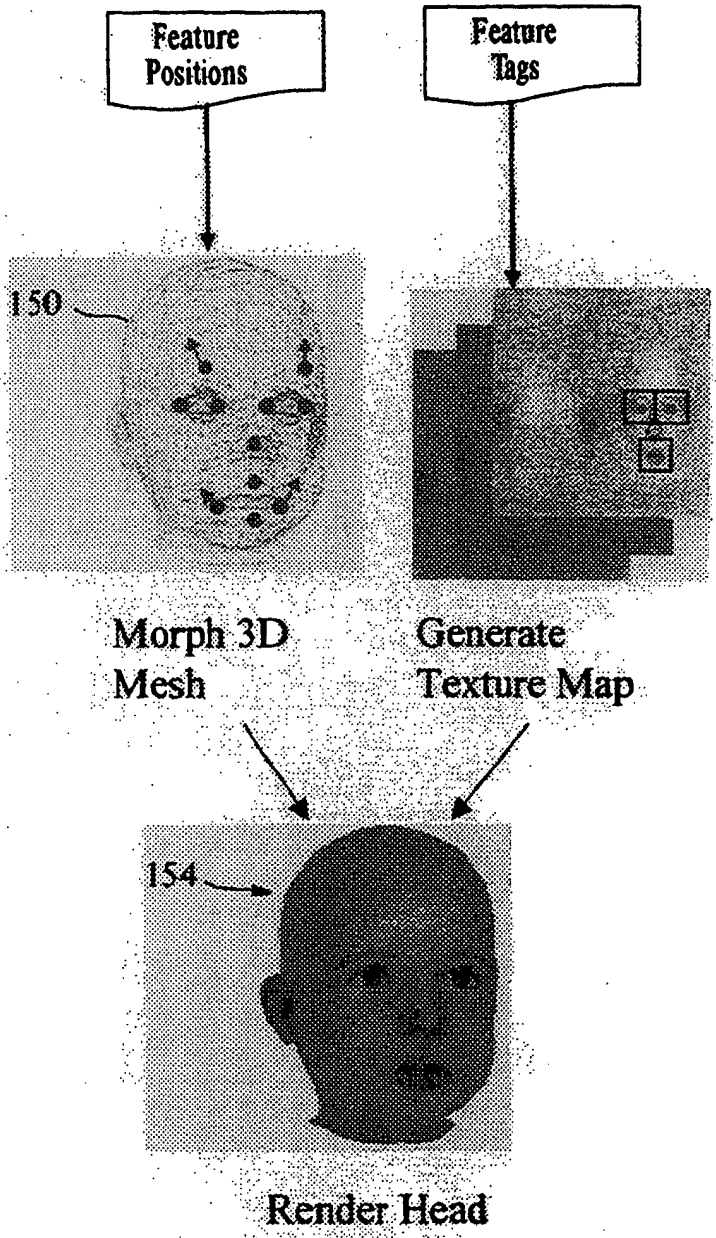

Feature Positions
Feature Tags
150
Morph 3D Mesh
Generate Texture Map
154
Render Head

FIG. 17

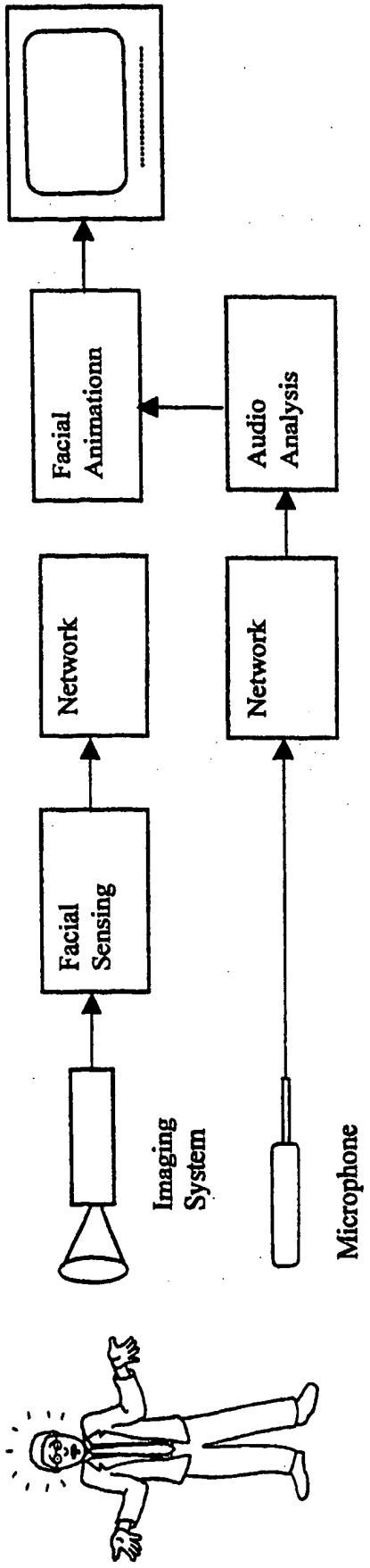

Facial Animationn
Audio Analysis
Network
Network
Facial Sensing
Imaging System
Microphone

FIG. 18

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Interr — nal Application No
PCT/US 99/07933

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 6 G06T7/20 G06K9/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 6 G06T G06K

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the International search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category °	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	MAURER T ET AL: "Tracking and learning graphs and pose on image sequences of faces" PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AUTOMATIC FACE AND GESTURE RECOGNITION (CAT. NO.96TB100079), PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AUTOMATIC FACE AND GESTURE RECOGNITION, KILLINGTON, VT, USA, 14-16 OCT. 1996, pages 176-181, XP002115609 1996, Los Alamitos, CA, USA, IEEE Comput. Soc. Press, USA ISBN: 0-8186-7713-9 page 176, right-hand column, paragraph 2 -page 178, paragraph 4 --- -/--	1,6,20, 22,25

[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

[X] Patent family members are listed in annex.

° Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
17 September 1999	05/10/1999

Name and mailing address of the ISA	Authorized officer
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